

2001

Instructional Technology at Cabell Library

Jimmy Ghaphery

Virginia Commonwealth University, jghapher@vcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/libraries_pubs

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Presented by permission of LOEX.

Downloaded from

http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/libraries_pubs/27

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the VCU Libraries at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in VCU Libraries Faculty and Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY AT CABELL LIBRARY

James Ghaphery

Introduction

Instructional technology is being employed in a number of settings at James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. Both end-users and library staff are using forms of Web-based instruction. These very different efforts from the past year have yielded a number of lessons learned and provide a good sense of direction for future forays into the electronic learning environment.

Getting Started with your Research: A Web-based Tutorial

<http://www.library.vcu.edu/help/getstarted.html>

“Getting Started with your Research” is a series of instructional Web pages. In preparing to create this site, many existing library Web tutorials were examined. The ACRL/CNI Internet Education Project (<http://www.cwru.edu/affil/cni/base/acrlcni.html>) offered an especially useful collection of Web-based tutorials. Closer to home, Virginia library Web sites were also visited as many of these institutions have access to similar sets of databases through consortial agreements. Upon visiting many sites it became apparent that one of the initial decisions in constructing a Web tutorial was whether or not to include external links such as proprietary databases, Internet search tools, and help-pages developed by librarians from

other institutions. While this content adds obvious value, one does risk the fact that an end-user could quickly click away from the instructional pages. After weighing these options, we decided to include external resources in order to create a space that offered both instruction and navigational access to research databases.

Initial Planning

Before launching the site, a concerted effort was made to pull in the interested parties of departmental faculty, library teaching staff, and library desk staff. Departmental faculty, especially those from the English department, proved to be strong allies from the beginning. The English department was in the process of creating a new writing and rhetoric class that placed a renewed emphasis on research skills. As such, these Web pages were a welcome resource for the English department. Input was received from key faculty members over the summer when the “Getting Started” pages were still in draft form. At the start of the semester, an announcement was sent to all of the writing and rhetoric instructors about both the new Web site and our traditional face to face bibliographic instruction. Some instructors took advantage of both resources. In these cases the library instruction sessions were able to begin at a more advanced level. Initial contact with English faculty also proved to be useful as a separate suggested assignment was drafted by the head of the writing and rhetoric program and distributed to all of the writing instructors. This assignment

Ghaphery is instruction and outreach librarian at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. <jsghaphe@vcu.edu>



Search



Catalog



Forms



Services



Help

Getting Started with your Research

[Choosing a topic](#)

[Search tips](#)

[Library locations](#)

[Evaluate your research](#)

[Help](#)

how to find:

[Books](#)

[Magazines & Journals](#)

[Government Documents](#)

[Internet Sites](#)

[Current Events](#)

[Return to the top of this page](#)

● *University Library Services - Thursday, 30-Apr-98*

James Ghaphery - Instruction and Outreach Services

Email: jghapher@saturn.vcu.edu

Figure 1: Getting Started with Your Research

pointed to many of the library Web pages and certainly accounted for much of the use of these pages.

Library desk staff (librarians, support staff, and students) have also played an important role in the formation and implementation of these pages. Since the site attempts to be both navigational and instructional, desk staff have the ability to refer patrons to these pages. This is especially helpful when a Reference or Instructional librarian is not available for direct consultation. Teaching staff are likewise instrumental in promoting these pages as avenues for follow-up once a bibliographic instruction session has ended. A final group that was consulted throughout the authoring phases of these pages was student workers. Their input was invaluable in terms of the initial fielding and beta testing of these Web pages.

A final area of gathering support for the program, was the location of the "Getting Started" pages within the library Web site. Since this set of pages serves a wide target audience, we were able to position them

in a significant manner on the "Help and Advice" section of the library Web site. "Getting Started" is accessible with two clicks from most any page on the library Web. Without this location, it would be much more difficult for both end users and staff to even consider a visit.

Evaluation

Once the site was launched a number of evaluative efforts were made, both formal and informal. Some students who were given the assignment of reading these pages also came to the library for face to face instruction. I would often ask these students directly what they thought about the pages, what suggestions they may have, and what was especially confusing. Not only did this serve as an informal evaluation of the pages, but it also worked well as an introduction for the BI session itself. Many of the students seemed to have retained some of the basic concepts from the



Search



Catalog



Forms



Services



Help

Magazines and Journals

SearchBank

Start your magazine research with [SearchBank](#).

Approximately 40% of the entries contain the **full text** of the article.

[SearchBank Help](#)

FirstSearch

[FirstSearch](#) gives you access to more than 40 research databases. Includes the arts, social sciences and sciences.

Tutorial: [FirstSearch Tour](#)

Subject List of Databases

The VCU Libraries provide access to many other magazine, journal, and newspaper databases. Check here for the [BIG list](#).

When the full text is not online...

Unlike SearchBank, most research databases do not contain the full text of each magazine or journal article. Instead, they will give you the citation or reference to the article. In order to determine if the VCU Libraries subscribe to the publication that you need, [follow these steps](#).

When you need magazine and journal articles written before 1985

Back to [Getting Started with your Research](#)

Shortcuts:

Choosing a Topic

▼ Go

[\[Return to the top of this page\]](#)

● *University Library Services - Monday, 18-May-98*

James Ghaphery - Instruction and Outreach Services

Email: jghapher@saturn.vcu.edu

Figure 2: Magazines and Journals



Search



Catalog



Forms



Services



Help

Search Tips

Create a list of search terms

- Brainstorm lists of synonyms or related terms.
 - Computer databases will only eat the **exact** words that you feed them. For example, if you search for the word "car", you will NOT find entries under the words "automobile", "transportation", "highways", "Ford", etc.
- Add to this list throughout the research process by paying attention to the titles and subjects of the sources you find.

Understand how to combine your search terms

- Using and, or, not in a database search.

Know your database

- Ask these questions about any database for best results.

Back to [Getting Started with your Research](#)

Shortcuts:

Choosing a Topic



[\[Return to the top of this page\]](#)

● *University Library Services - Monday, 18-May-98*

James Ghaphery - Instruction and Outreach Services

Email: jghapher@saturn.vcu.edu

Figure 3: Search Tips



Search



Catalog



Forms



Services



Help

And Or Not Quiz

1. The best way to narrow down a search by combining two or more search terms is to use:

☒ AND☐ OR☐ NOT

● Check out the correct answer and explanation.

2. How can you limit a search by excluding specific terms?

☐ AND☐ OR☐ NOT

● Check out the correct answer and explanation.

3. What is the best way to combine synonyms (like terms)?

☐ AND☐ OR☐ NOT

● Check out the correct answer and explanation.

4. Which type of search would you include inside a parenthetical nest?

☐ AND☐ OR☐ NOT

● Check out the correct answer and explanation.

Back to Getting Started with your Research

Shortcuts:

Choosing a Topic

▼ Go

[Return to the top of this page]

Figure 4: And Or Not Quiz



Search



Catalog



Forms



Services



Help

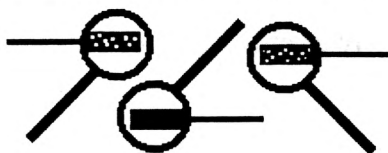
Evaluate your Sources

ation information
ation information



From books to Internet sites to television to scholarly journal articles, it is always important to critically evaluate information.

One of the best allies in the evaluation process is **variety**. Compare and contrast your sources



Ask yourself these questions:



Who is the Author?

- Are any credentials or qualifications given?
- Who is the publisher?



Is the Information Accurate?

- Are facts and statistics verifiable?
- Is there a bibliography?



Is the Information Objective?

- Is there any noticeable bias?



Is the Information Current?

- Is currency important based on your topic?

Other Evaluation Tips

- Evaluating Sources of Information. Lynn Cameron, Carrier Library, James Madison University
- Evaluating Web Resources. Jan Alexander and Marsha Tate, Wolfgram Memorial Library, Widener University
- Evaluating Web Sites for Educational Uses: Bibliography and Checklist. Carolyn Kotlas, Institute for Academic Technology
- How to Evaluate the Sources You Find. Michael Engle, Cornell University Library
 - Includes Distinguishing Scholarly from Non-Scholarly Periodicals
- T is for Thinking. John Henderson, Ithaca College Library

Figure 5: Evaluate Your Sources

“Getting Started” pages, and were ready for more advanced concepts.

Formal written surveys were distributed to English composition classes at the end of the Fall 1997 semester. Two consistent themes emerged from these evaluations. First, the students found these pages to be helpful and often advised us to keep them going for future classes. This was true for both students who did and did not receive BI follow-up. The second theme was that the students felt that some of the pages were too wordy and that internal site navigation could be improved. During the winter, steps were taken to both streamline the top level pages of the tutorial and to institute a new navigational design.

A final change to the pages was adding a statistical counter to the “Getting Started” main page for the Spring of 1998. This counter recorded 1,150 visits during the Spring semester. Counters have recently been added to the secondary pages in an effort to look for larger patterns of use. In a purely design consideration these counters are hidden from the public. While these evaluative efforts have shed some light on the success and failures of the pages, there are still many unanswered questions about the overall effectiveness of this Web-based tutorial, especially in terms of long term knowledge and skill retention.

Objectives and Architecture

While much of the design and content was determined by input from interested parties and evaluations, there were several goals upon which the Web pages were grounded. As the Web-learning environment is largely self-directed, efforts were made to use natural language, thus seeking clarity of instruction. Further, the architecture of the pages attempted to offer both basic and advanced concepts. Typically, each of the top sections (Figure 1) contains links to the most commonly used tools and very basic searching advice. These pages are also very brief in an effort to present an inviting and non-threatening sense of space. In addition to the rudimentary advice and navigation, links from each page also lead to more detailed concepts. For example, the “How to Find Magazines and Journals” page (Figure 2), not only contains links to two databases, but also branches out for a more in depth look at searching for periodicals. This second layer includes a subject list of all of our databases, instruction on locating hard copy of articles in the library, and advice on researching periodical literature written before 1985.

Half of the “Getting Started” site deals solely with instruction and does not include links to searchable indexes or databases. These pages also employ a similar architecture whereby the top level is concise with

secondary links to more detailed information. For example, the “Search Tips” page offers three basic areas of advice (Figure 3). One of these points deals with boolean logic and links to a secondary page which includes further explanation and Venn diagram illustrations. A third-level page (Figure 4) contains an interactive java script quiz whereby the user can test his or her grasp of the content.

In addition to the pragmatic goals of creating a natural language site that offers varying levels of help, the theoretical basis of the pages attempts to encourage a critical research approach. The overall division of pages by type of source (books, magazines and journals, government documents, current events, and Internet sites) is intended to offer a gateway toward a variety of research for any given topic. In addition, one of the key pages on the site is “Evaluate your Sources” (Figure 5). While this page is notable for its brevity in comparison to other evaluation sites, the ideas of authority, currency, accuracy, and bias are presented amidst the idea of searching for a variety of sources. From the evaluation page, the user is able to link to a number of excellent Web pages about evaluation developed by librarians from other institutions. The Web-learning environment, thus, offers diverse paths and options for the learner and is able to take advantage of expertise that is not bound by geography or time.

Reference Training Modules

<http://www.library.vcu.edu/help/train>

A second set Web pages have been created that focus solely on staff training. This program supplements existing training efforts and by no means serves as a substitute for our professional staff. Indeed, one of the major components in our Reference and Periodicals desk training for staff and student workers is the concept of referral. Within the framework of a safety net of referral, we do expect our desk workers to be familiar with basic concepts of the Reference interview, including asking open ended questions and follow-up.

The training modules include two case studies with virtual patrons. Much of the inspiration for these pages comes from the field of medical education, where computer-based case studies have been used for some time. Each module was constructed in HTML and java script. The virtual patron offers a very vague question as a starting point. The staff person must then choose from a menu of choices. Incorrect answers lead to prompts which offer a critique (sometimes humorous) of the response. Correct answers lead to a new response from the virtual patron which in turn leads to a new menu of choices for the staff person. In this way, the module builds on various branching choices which

finally lead to the “correct” answer. These pages are extremely new and have just begun to be fielded in Cabell library. At this writing, there is no data on their overall effectiveness, although they have been greeted enthusiastically by supervisors as yet another option for the difficult job of training staff and students who work at our public service desks.

Areas for Improvement

Aside from the library training benefits of the Reference Desk modules, these pages provide a glimpse of a more interactive Web-based instructional environment. The boolean logic quiz within “Getting Started”, by comparison, offers only isolated feedback from question to question. By employing branching logic, the Web environment can make use of simulation and engage the user in a more complex set of tasks. One of the major plans for the “Getting Started” site this summer is the addition of a similar interactive case study that focuses on critical evaluation of sources.

A final need and goal for all of the instructional technology at Cabell Library is the implementation of online closure and retention strategies. Unlike a traditional classroom setting, there is not a predefined point in time when the instruction ends. While there are benefits to the remedial learner who may want to repeat a lesson or proceed at a slower pace, the electronic setting can suffer from a lack of closure. How do we encourage retention and critical reflection in the fast pace of the Web-based environment? A student might quickly finish up a set of instructional Web pages and then hop right over to his favorite chat

room only to forget the previous instruction. In order to encourage the transfer of learning and reflection, pages should be set up at the end of online lessons that summarize the major points. Further, one could offer a space for the students to write notes about the concepts and e-mail those notes back to themselves. In this way, the student would receive an electronic follow-up for each lesson. In essence, the student would enjoy the benefits of an electronic notebook as he or she progressed through any set of pages. In terms of bibliographic instruction, the effectiveness of the pages is also tied to how well the pages match up with the research that the student is ready to embark upon. If the instruction is not relevant then any design will face an uphill battle.

Conclusion

The environment of Web-based learning is certainly new, offering the potential for access to instruction on demand and across the same platform of many of our research tools. The strategies for employing Web-based training are not, however, as revolutionary. Instructional design, program planning, and bibliographic instruction theory have all spoken to the need for involving interested parties, seeking appropriate evaluative feedback, making instruction relevant, increasing retention, and seeking closure. While the environment does indeed look different, the most important ingredient is a grasp of these fundamental issues, which still serve as a well-worn guide for the instructional designer.